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ABSTRACT

Since its creation by federal legislation in 1917, vocational education in U.S. high schools has enjoyed a high level of public support. Recently, an increasing number of studies have begun to question the degree to which vocational education in the United States has had an economic payoff for its students. The fact that vocational education continues to flourish while evidence of its shortcomings mounts is thus puzzling. One answer lies in the American belief system, which exerts powerful yet hidden influences on vocational education and thereby insulates it from social demands for change. From its beginning, vocational education has been a logical extension of the American dream of getting ahead by one's own hard work. Vocational education's promises of equality of opportunity, reaffirmation of individual effort and self-determination, and emphasis on hard work and material success have won it loyal support among Americans that persists despite research indicating that its job placement and wage rates are not as high as once thought. It thus appears that, although the country's fundamental belief in vocational education was originally instrumental in developing and popularizing it, today this same belief may actually be impeding the adaptation of vocational education to contemporary needs. As rigidity replaces innovation, programs become increasingly separate from the larger educational enterprise, and narrow skill training is substituted for general education for students who can least afford the costs of being ill prepared. (MN)

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CAPTURED BY THE AMERICAN DREAM: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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Captured by the American Dream: Vocational Education in the United States

by:

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for:

A Conference on "Vocationalising Education"
University of London Institute of Education
May 7, 1986

Since it was created under federal legislation in 1917, vocational education in US high schools has enjoyed a high level of public support. According to a recent report by the National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education, in 1984 nearly $9 billion was spent on high school vocational programs in 1984 (National Commission, 1984). Originally designed to help youngsters who were deemed unfit for higher education to get vocational skills and thus rise in sub-professional jobs, vocational education was a logical extension of the American Dream--getting ahead by one's own hard work. However, recently an increasing number of studies have called into question the degree to which vocational education in the US has an economic payoff for its students. Additionally, some critics maintain that vocational programs, rather than advancing social mobility, may in fact contribute to occupational and class stratification by substituting job training for education and tracking students into dead-end jobs.

Thus, it is puzzling how vocational education appears to flourish while evidence mounts as to its shortcomings. The answers, I think, can be found in vocational education's deep roots in the American belief in success as well as in its ability to continue to channel millions of federal dollars each

year to a long-established, powerful political constituency. This analysis reveals ways in which the American belief system exerts powerful, but hidden, influences on vocational education, thereby insulating it from social demands for change. This paper also points to limits inherent in transplanting social programs from one culture to another.

The Deep Roots of Belief

Though most of us take comfort in the orderliness and predictability of the universe, the systems of thought that lend it order are in truth only beliefs--philosophy, economics, religion and others. Science is no exception. It is widely accepted as scientific fact, for example, that movements of the earth's plates cause earthquakes, viruses cause cancer, and environment and genes produce differences in childrens' IQs. While other explanations exist, they are ruled out by the prevailing belief. Likewise with religion. Christ's existence as the son of God is accepted by most Christians without question. No other interpretations are acceptable. Each system of thought has its own standard for acceptable evidence that affirms and avances the belief. For example, scientific evidence must be replicable, while religious evidence is taken as a matter of faith.

Belief, according to Murphey (1979), is a means of accounting for experience that provides psychological and social order. By accounting for experiences, events that could be frightening are ordered and harmony replaces potential chaos. Consequently, we humans who have developed without the benefit of instinct to safely steer in a dangerously topsy-turvey universe, and use our beliefs as a basis for action. For example, while learned 14th century French physicians attributed the origins of the horrifying black plague to a unique alignment of celestial bodies, most common people interpreted it as the wrath of God. Thus, many who so believed took action by repenting for their sins, while others took the more extreme step of joining processions of penitants (Tuchman, 1978). As new information came to light over the following 500 years refocusing blame for the plague on the bacillus, Pasturella pestis, the scientific belief system changed to accomodate the new view.

Murphey points out that while most belief systems change slowly, some are more stubborn and resistant to change than others. Beliefs that change most slowly are those that society needs most. As a threatened person clings to outmoded but comfortable beliefs, cutures too demand constancy around certain key beliefs that provide order and safety.

But, how do cultures deal with evidence that contradicts key beliefs? One way is to separate the discordant evidence from the belief. Thus, only recently have some physical scientists

ventured into the examination of psychic phenomena, which for centuries have been relegated to the occult because they contradict key principles of physics. Another way of coping with such tension is to delay action on reexamining the belief in question for some time later in the future. Another strategy where sufficient power can be mustered, is to insure that questions that hold the potential for producing evidence that conflicts with predominant beliefs are never asked, or to suppress discordant information. Finally, information can be ignored or discredited if it is at odds with prevailing beliefs. The implications of these strategies for coping with information that threaten existing belief systems will be discussed in more detail later.

How to Succeed In America: The Roots of Vocational Education

I wish to turn now to an examination of how the prevailing belief of success in the US serves to maintain and insulate vocational education from change, despite mounting evidence as to its shortcomings.

Much of the popular American literature of the late 19th century captured the essence of the American belief in material wealth and success. Three authors in particular inspired the vision of success in millions of America's young men. Horatio Alger, who is credited with popularizing the "rags to riches" belief, wrote at least 120 books that sold more than 17 million

copies. The titles themselves, which include Ragged Dick, Mark the Matchboy, The Cash Boy, Risen from the Ranks, Andy Grant's Pluck, and Bound to Rise reveal key elements of the formula for success. P.T. Barnum, who created America's three-ring circus, authored The Life of P.T. Barnum, Written by Himself in 1854 which is reported to have sold a half-million copies. According to Rischin (1965), Barnum gave his lecture, "The Art of Money-Getting" over 100 times, and Horace Greeley thought Barnum's lecture was "worth a hundred-dollar greenback to a beginner in life." Rischin notes that Barnum's popularity brough him at his death, "more newspaper space...than that of any other American not a President of the United States." Andrew Carnegie, who began life in the US as a young Scottish immigrant and later became one of the nation's wealthiest industrialists, promoted key themse of the American Dream that had served him so well. Four tenets of the American Dream ran through Alger's, Barnum's and Carnegie's books, articles and speeches. First was the conviction that all men are created equal. As Barnum put it, "That we are born `free and equal' is a glorious truth in one sense, but we are not all born equally rich, and we never shall be." Material wealth stood for success, a neccessary reinterpretation of the Protestant ethic to suit it to the American industrial revolution. The nation offered unlimited opportunity, but those who would succeed had to seize it. The belief held that men are responsible for their

own positions in life, and the deserving ones rise by their own effort. One of Alger's chronicler's, Rychard Fink (1962) summarized this aspect of the American Dream by observing that life is a competitive struggle which weeds out the unfit. Wealth and power thus go to those with the most determination and pluck--to those who seize opportunity. In Adam Smith's view, individual effort was basic to the industrial, economic and political orders. According to Smith, independent man, governed by divine laws of human nature, was to follow his own interests, so long as no harm came to others. The net result of accumulated individual free acts was to serve the general good. A law of mutual obligation was also a key element in the belief structure. Those who had already succeeded were obliged to help those, who because of circumstances beyond their control, were less fortunate. But, an added footnote declared that a man's obligation to help others was limited to helping only those who had the right stuff--those who in time would also rise in life and succeed. As P.T. Barnum put it:

> The best kind of charity is to help those who are willing to help themselves. Promiscuous almsgiving, without inquiring into the worthiness of the applicant, is bad in every sense.

Finally, certain behavior and characteristics set those who would ultimately rise apart from those who were destined to stay at the bottom. If nothing else was ingrained in American boys who wanted to succeed, it was the admonition: "be willing to

start at the bottom and work hard." After all, hard work was morally right. Alger's novels hammered at the theme relentlessly. For example in Bound to Rise, the hero, Harry Walton, tells his mother about the life of Benjamin Franklin:

> Do you know, mother, he was a poor boy and he worked his way up?...I've been thinking that there's a chance for me, mother....A chance to be somebody when I get bigger. I'm poor now, but so was Franklin. He worked hard and tried to learn all he could. That's the way he succeeded. I'm going to do the same.

As the scene continues, Harry's mother urges him not to aim too high, perhaps to spare Harry her own feelings of failure. Harry, undaunted, muses:

> I read in the paper the other day that many of the richest men in Boston and New York were once poor boys....If they succeeded, I don't see why I can't.

In Carnegie's "The Road to Business Success," he lauded the rags to riches belief.

> I congratulate poor young men upon being born to that ancient and honourable degree which renders it necessary that they should devote themselves to hard work....Look out for the boy who has to plunge into work direct from the common school and who begins by sweeping out the office. He is the probable dark horse that you had better watch.

Further, boys who would succeed had to learn habits of thrift and self-denial. P.T. Barnum, like Alger, took guidance from Benjamin Franklin's philosophy. Barnum observed:

> ...however easy it is may be found to make money, I have no doubt many of my hearers will agree it is the most difficult thing in the world to keep it. The road to wealth, as Dr. Franklin truly says, "as plain as the road to mill." It consists in spending less than we earn.

Carnegie also promoted the notions of thrift and self-denial. He explained:

> There is one sure mark of the coming partner, the future millionaire; his revenues always exceed his expenditures. He begins to save early, almost as soon as he begins to earn....Capitalists trust the saving young man.

The young man on the rise must be loyal to his employer, he must acquire skill and knowledge of his job, and be organized and punctual. Alger's heros were always faithful, passing up opportunities to profit at their employers' expense. Their hard work and habits of industry led them to naturally rise on the job partly because of their attention to detail. A crucial distinction between those who would rise and those who wouldn't was that of individual initiative and self-reliance. Andrew Carnegie put it this way:

> Faithful and conscientious discharge of the duties assigned you is all very well, but the verdict in such cases generally is that you perform your present duties so well that you had better continue performing them....The rising man must do something exceptional, and beyond the range of his special department. HE MUST ATTRACT ATTENTION. A shipping clerk may do so by discovering in an invoice an error with which he has nothing to do which has escaped the attention of the proper party.

Above all, young men who will succeed must have certain personality characteristics. Honesty, charitableness, cheerfulness and optimism set them apart from the others.

Finally, courage and resolution, or pluck, were essentials. Like Alger's hero Luke Larkin. He was:

> ...the son of a carpenter's widow, living on narrow means, and so compelled to exercize the strictest economy....(Luke) filled the position of janitor at the school which he attended, sweeping out twice a week and making the fires. He had a pleasant expression, and a bright, resolute look, a warm heart, and a clear intellect...

Thus, by clarifying and popularizing themes of the American dream, Alger, Barnum and Carnegie helped to forge key axioms that undergirded the near-universal American belief in success that persists yet in the late 20th century. This belief, like beliefs of other times, defined relationships between individuals and their environments, and provided a basis for action.

The Development of Vocational Education

It was from this belief in success that vocational education grew. The notion that everyone was equal at birth, and that success derived from one's own self-determination and hard work were at the belief's root. Further, those who were so determined and worked hard would naturally form those habits and characteristics that made them deserving. The advance of post-Civil War industrialism, however, promised to alter some of the basic tenets of the American belief in success. Men were replaced with machines, and dreadful working conditions persisted in the factories. Late 19th century public schooling, which sought to equalize Americans' opportunities came under

heavy attack for being deadening and out of touch with changing labor market needs (Grubb and Lazerson, 1974). The restoration of these tenets of American life called for a powerful antidote, and reforming the schools became a priority. Ultimately, one of American public education's most progressive programs was developed--the Smith-Hughes Act which ushered in vocational education.

The rationale that led to the development of vocational education grew out of the manual training movement of the 1880s and 1890s that too was based on the American belief in success. Manual training was heavily influenced by a Swedish educational system known as "Sloyd," which literally means "skill" or "dexterity," which emphasized the use of carpenters' tools and mechanical drawing to develop the intellect and character through manual work. The Sloyd system found quick acceptance among American educators because, as the December 13, 1982 edition of the Santa Barbara Morning Press proclaimed:

> Sloyd develops the child physically, mentally and morally. It is intended to mean something more than mere mechanical skill--valuable as that is. Its object is the intelligent exercise of the whole body. It aims to develop character and to so train a child as to fit him in the future to become a useful and worthy citizen (Ellenwood, 1960, p. 17).

Retrospectively, the nation's interest in manual training before the turn of the century seems inevitable. It was educationally sound, productive, and wholly consistent with the American belief in success. But, unlike Alger, Barnum and Carnegie, who credited the individual's habits and character for upward mobility, manual training put the burden on the school. Educators assumed that manual training would make school more interesting to children, who would then stay long enough to learn the basics and a few manual skills, and explore some likely occupations. The process, according to the common wisdom, would promote equality of opportunity.

Despite manual training's promise, it never took a firm enough hold on the American mind to endure. Because it was eagerly and visibly extended to juvenile delinquents and southern blacks, its image became one of "philanthropic education for social deviants" (Grubb and Lazerson, 1974). A national depression in the early 1890s also undercut manual training for the sake of economy (Ellenwood, 1960). In 1910 David Snedden, Commissioner of Education for Massachusetts and an important figure in the vocational education movement, faulted manual training for being liberal education in disguise, which rarely resulted in any recognizable form of "vocational efficiency" (Snedden, 1910).

Unfortunately, the ills of society that manual training sought to cure continued to worsen into the 20th century. Dreiser and other social critics of the early 1900s described how large cities such as Chicago were like huge magnets, attracting the "hopeful and the hopeless" (Dreiser, 1958). Industrial expansion was well under way, and cheap, unskilled labor was in high demand. In a drive for efficiency and profit, factory jobs were broken down to their simplest components, so that they could be performed by interchangable, unskilled workers. As cities became crowded with the hopeful and the hopeless, the more fortunate took these blind-alley jobs, the less fortunate joined the growing unemployment lines and the specter of social unrest became apparent.

The nation intensified its consideration of solutions to remedy these national crises. In the years preceding World War I, many influential groups developed proposals to include vocational training in public schools to restore faith in the American belief of success and to boost productivity. In 1914, Congress, moved by the public tide, created the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education to bring the proposals for vocational training together under a legislative proposal. The Commission's work resulted in the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. Because the legislation was set deeply in the American belief system, remarkably dissonant groups including the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Federation of Labor, and the National Education Association supported it.

An analysis of influential documents of the time, including the Commission's report and hearings that preceded the Smith-Hughes Act, reveals that the appeal for a national program of vocational education was based on the key tenets of the American belief in material success--equalizing opportunities, promoting individual effort or self-determination, and emphasizing the morality of hard work and success. Supporters of vocational education further assumed that, according to the deeply-held American belief, students who worked hard would naturally develop those habits and personality traits that would make them deserving and thus help them rise.

Equality of Opportunity

Vocational education would help assure equality of opportunity by providing people with the broad technical skills necessary for employment in the new industrial order. further, those who were fit and capable would be able to rise to their highest levels of ability.

Vocational education supporters acknowledged modern industry's powerful influence in creating a class-bound society. The stifling jobs that industry created in the name of efficiency brought into existence a lower industrial class from which the unskilled could not escape. By offering youngsters a wide range of vocational choices and insuring broad transferable training, the schools could break this cycle and become advocates for both working men and women and industry. Lapp and Mote gently put the blame at industry's feet:

> Perhaps industry is not to be held accountable for the cataclysmic peril of individualism run riot, but industrial education will free the workers from the enticements of "blind-alley" jobs, facilitate the realization of an economic democracy and in the end raze the bulwarks of class exploitation, an ideal from which industry certainly is not to emerge a loser (Lapp and Mote, 1915).

Industry's quest to maximize profits through efficiency required a systematic approach to management. Pioneered by Frederick Tyalor around 1885, scientific management was perhaps the first organized approach to work--analyzing work into its simplest elements, and directing systematic improvements in how the worker performed. The needs of efficiency militated against human development. According to Lapp and Mote, "manufacturers want men...who are content to stay at one machine process until they have become proficient in it." Vocational educators reacted against this dehumanizing attitude, and maintained that industrial skills were a way out of repetitive, stultifying work. Vocational education would promote equality of opportunity by providing all students with the chance for industrial training. Industrial training would also help working men to gain control over their own lives through economic self-sufficiency. Ultimately, some argued, the workforce would become so skilled that employers would become

dependent on their employees, forcing them to include employees in vital decisions that affected their lives.

> ...as long as the worker is poorly trained, as long as he is an inefficient factor in production and his place is easily filled, he can be dominated through fear of losing a poor job. Let the worker become a skilled artisan or let him through a combination of cooperation gain control of the supply of the product that he has to sell, then he becomes a potent factor in determining hours, wages and working conditions. Moreover, as soon as he becomes a skilled worker, his power and importance as a citizen are enhanced and he begins to tamper with the machinery at the source of his master's political strength (Lapp and Mote, 1915).

These proposals to increase individuals' sense of potency in the face of rapid industrial growth were only peripheral, however, to their primary objective--to promote equal opportunity in the face of a rapidly advancing a class system which was based on occupational status and education.

Reaffirmation of Individual Effort and Self-Determinism

But, as a horse can be only led to water and must drink from his own determination, individuals had to be determined and self-reliant to rise in the American class structure. Thus, reaffirming the importance of individual effort was a focal point of the proposals to revolutionize American schools through vocational education. Secretary of Commerce, William Redfield, poignantly described the meaning of individual effort in his testimony supporting vocational education. He told of a boy "willing enough, but quite unable and quite untaught" who took

the only employment he could find, which was driving a grocer's cart for $2.50 per week. The low wage was barely enough to live on, let alone support the boy's aging and unemployed parents. This low-level employment was, in Redfield's words, degrading to the boy's sense of manhood and fearfully injurious to his home. Low-level work was not inherently evil, but this boy like Alger's heroes, was virtuous and always on the lookout for opportunity. The boy found training as an electrician through the help of a private organization. Two years later, through his own hard work and aided by the stewardship of this private training organization, he had increased his earnings tenfold. He was then able to discharge his responsibilies to his parents and take his rightful place in society.

Although it was proposed that vocational education be publicly subsidized, this was not at odds with an emerging early 20th century American conception of individual freedom. It simply added a new dimension, which recognized and affirmed the responsibility of the more-fortunate to help the less-fortunate. In this more contemporary view of individualism, the public schools served as stewards, providing the avenue of skill training to work and material success.

Hard Work and Material Success

Vocational education also underscored the importance of hard work to succeed. As an added benefit, students' diligent study and hard work would increase national productivity. Reaffirming

this aspect of the American Dream found immediate support among legislators and their constituents who felt that the belief in an individual's hard work was losing its hold among the new class of factory workers, which in turn had a deleterious effect on national productivity. Accordingly, achieving greater economic productivity through vocational education rested with tapping childrens' life-career motives:

> Primarily it is the motive of personal advancement. Show a man how he can better his economic condition by acquiring further knowledge, and he will assiduously seek to acquire it if his ambition has not atrophied; show a youth how the knowledge that the school gives couples up with a life-work, and he seeks the knowledge eagerly (Lapp and Mote, 1915).

The schools, vocational education advocates maintained, should point individuals toward a better economic condition. These advocates claimed that the schools of the day existed in a culture that valued the work of the mind over work of the hands, lacked usefulness for students and employers alike, and failed to capitalize on students'life-career motives.

How Well Has It Done?

Between 1917 and the mid-1970s little research was done on how well vocational education actually fulfilled its social purpose. The lack of such information reflects in part, a public acceptance that like many religious beliefs, is based on faith. And, like the religious faithful, believers are less swayed by empirical evidence than by anecdote and example. Recognizing this fact, the American Vocational Association

(vocational education's political arm) has for years orchestrated a highly successful public relations campaign through local newspapers about boys and girls who have pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps and succeeded through their vocational education programs, thus testifying to its value.

The lack of evaluative research can be explained also by the powerful grip in which the vocational education lobby held research funds. Until the early 1970s, vocational education was regarded by most policymakers and researchers as a moribund topic that held little interest for research. Further, the American Vocational Association, and the federal bureau that dispensed research funds, had exclusive and undisputed control over the research agenda. Thus, until Congress created the National Institute of Education in 1973, which in its early years operated independently of special interests, evaluative research was limited to maintaining vocational education's political appeal through descriptive studies.

However, by the early 1970s, the issue of youth unemployment had attracted national interest. Also, the National Institute of Education had been set up and authorized to invest substantial amounts of money in research on pressing national educational issues. Since then, millions of dollars have been spent on vocational education and research, which have produced widely varying conclusions about its results. (See for example,

Michael Kirst, Research Papers for Vocational Education: Compliance and Enforcement of Federal Laws, planning Papers for the Vocational Education Study, National Institute of Education, Washington, D.C., 1979; National Planning Association, Policy Issues and Analytical Problems in Evaluating Vocational Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C., 1972; M. Zymelman, The Economic Evaluation of Vocational Training Programs, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976.) A large reason for the disparity between studies' findings lies in the messiness of social science research and in the problem of adequately controlling for differences in students' backgrounds and abilities.

The evidence suggests that high school vocational programs may have superior holding power only for black women. Despite problems in adequately controlling for students' backgrounds, Bachman (1972) found that college preparatory students are the least likely to drop out. He also found very little difference in dropout behavior among vocational, general, and agriculture students. Grasso and Shea (1979) contrasted the holding power of occupational and general high school programs and concluded that black women in business and office programs persist better, but both black and white men in vocational programs drop out more frequently than do their general program counterparts.

Except for the experience of women graduates of high school office programs, little persuasive evidence exists that high school vocational programs, compared with other high school programs, pay off in placement and earnings. In two of the few studies that questioned the value of high school vocational education programs prior to the mid-1970s, Kaufman and others (1967) and Vincent (1964) found virtually no earnings advantage for vocational graduates over others. More recently, Grasso and Shea (1979) concluded that for males, enrolling in a vocational or general program makes no difference in their rates of pay. They report some evidence that vocational graduates experience slower rates of growth in wages over time than do general graduates. But they also conclude that women who enrolled in business and office programs and took conventional jobs earned twenty-seven cents per hour more than women from other curricula. After reviewing the literature on high school vocational education, Berryman (1982) concluded that verbal and mathematical ability are more closely related to later earnings than are specific vocational skills.

In a federally-financed study of two divergent Los Angeles area locales, Wilms (1984) found that most employers do not favor hiring high school vocational education graduates or paying them more than others. To the extent that they voiced a preference for entry-level clerical, blue-collar, and service jobs, employers tended to favor applicants with academic rather

than vocational education backgrounds. Far from placing a premium on technical skills, most employers reported that good work habits and positive attitudes are essential to job success. The report noted that employers regarded educational credentials as valuable only insofar as they help to ensure that applicants have these attributes. Thus, they usually prefer to develop job skills informally through on-the-job training, and they expect the schools to inculcate proper work habits and attitudes.

Recently, the Committee for Economic Development, which comprises presidents of leading American businesses and universities, issued a report on education that commented flatly:

> However it is viewed, vocational education, with few exceptions, has failed to make a measurable impact on the successs of its graduates in the labor market....One exception to the poor track record...is secretarial training....Yet outside of this area and certain drafting, agricultural, auto mechanics, and crafts programs, there appear to be few vocational programs that justify the investment in them (Committee on Economic Development, 1985).

Finally, in his epic study of American schooling, Goodlad (1984) inquired about the social value of vocational education. His line of questioning developed from observations contained in the Harvard University report, General Education in a Free Society (1945), which underscored the social importance of a common high school curriculum. The report insisted:

> There are not and must not be two classes of citizens,

> separated by whether their diverse interests, gifts, and hopes depend on their heads or their hands (Report, 1945).

Never-the-less, forty years later, Goodlad and his research team found a discernable split between the academic and vocational programs in high schools, a split that tended to substitute job training for general education. Within vocational programs, Goodlad noted another dimension of inequality. Frequently, white vocational education students were enrolled in programs with a general education content like home economics and business while Mexican-American vocational students were disproportionately enrolled in programs aimed at preparation for lower-level jobs like cooking, sewing and auto repair. Goodlad commented:

> I was forced to think about this issue as I walked through, and observed students in the vocational education classes of the high schools we studied. The antiquated equipment in most of them would not have bothered me if its apparent function had been to assure all students an alternative mode of learning which we hope they will acquire through general education. The fact that the equipment did not parallel that of modern industry would have been of no significance. But it suddenly became of significance when principals, counselors, and vocational teachers spoke eloquently about the preparation of the students using it for immediate successful entry into the job market. The incongruity often was startling (Goodlad, 1985).

Constancy of the Belief

So, we now return to this paper's original question: why vocational programs persist in the face of such evidence. Since 1917 its funding has increased from $10 million to nearly $9 billion today. Sixty-five percent of all high school students in the U.S. are estimated to enroll in vocational programs of

one form or another. However, the evidence indicates that with the exception of typing and some business programs, little demand for it exists among employers and few vocational graduates achieve any notable successes. Contrary to its founding vision, vocational education does not appear to staunch dropout rates or live up to its potential as a superior pedagogical medium. Its failure no doubt stems from the lower-class stigma of manual work causing middle- and upper-class parents to avoid it. Vocational education's low status also derives from its being disproportionately targeted on low-income, minority students. The empirical evidence thus stands in sharp contrast to rhetoric of the original belief.

One reason for vocational education's persistence is revealed in a quip by Albert Quie, formerly the ranking Republican on the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor. "It's just good politics," said Quie, meaning that vocational education gets the money back home to constituents who believe in the program's purpose and thus support its legislative advocates. Indeed, the resources commanded by the program are substantial. More than 350,000 teachers alone depend on the $9 billion that annually flows through the vocational education pipeline to 15,000 high schools.

Vocational education's popularity stems also in part from its practical social function. Empirical evidence notwithstanding, these programs continue to be substituted for general education for students who fail to achieve in the academics. Thus,

frustrated educators and policymakers take comfort in the belief that these non-achieving students may nevertheless succeed.

Consequently, the American public, guided by the underlying belief in giving everyone an equal chance at success, continues to support vocational education. The program itself has changed remarkably little since 1917. Reflecting contemporary social values, girls are now included in more equal fashion with boys, as are the handicapped, displaced workers and other disadvantaged groups. Further, in response to public demands for greater economic productivity, vocational education has included economic development in its goals. And, as might be expected, the widespread belief in the American Dream still lies submerged beneath its surface. For example, at a 1984 legislative hearing, Jack Bailey, a member of one of Kentucky's vocational education advisory committee, testified:

> The higher level people you put out of these vocational schools, the more money they're going to make and the more taxes they'll pay, in my opinion. And if they go out there and ditch dig..., they're going to be paying very few taxes. If they are trained properly, they are going to go into higher tech, higher pay, higher paid jobs...(Hearings, 1984).

Not only is vocational education still regarded as a route to higher paying jobs, it is still believed to be a medium through which positive work habits and attitudes can be inculcated. At a legislative hearing a Virginia school official claimed:

> In the simplest way possible, let me explain what I see going on in vocational education. I see students who are busy. They are cutting hair, they are welding, they are laying brick....I see them interested in learning skills, developing good work habits...(Hearings, 1983)

Despite the social turbulence of the 1960s, Americans still cling to the dream that all people are born with equal chances for success, and that through individual effort and hard work, anyone can make it. The evidence is embedded in the culture. For example, "advance" obituaries written about famous living people and kept on file by newspapers for timely use at their deaths describe Ronald Reagan's career as, "From small-town Midwest boy to the most powerful man in the Free World.... Richard Nixon's eventual death will mark, "...the end of an American-dream career--from small-town boy to the nation's highest office..." (Rawitch, 1986). Evidence of the American dream is easily seen in the popular culture as well. "Success" books continue to be best-sellers. Mass advertising, whose themes must quickly establish themelves with prevailing beliefs, capitalize on success through individual effort. Daniel Yankelovich, a polster and observer of changing American lifestyles, notes that most Americans continue to believe that hard work and individual effort pay off (1982).

Implications for The Future

Thus, it appears that the constancy of the belief exerts a fundamental and powerful influence on vocational education. While the belief was originally instrumental in developing and popularizing vocational education, the evidence suggests that the belief may today impede the adaptation of vocational education to contemporary needs. Rigidity replaces innovation; programs become increasingly separate from the larger

educational enterprise; narrow skill training is substituted for general education for students who can least afford the costs of being ill-prepared. The power of the belief, however, continues to protect vocational education from social demands for change. The abiding conviction that anyone who works hard can get ahead, dulls the social need to rethink its educational strategies. The evidence doesn't really matter. Rhetoric and anecdote suffice.

Likewise, the implications of this analysis for developing nations seem important. As developing nations seek solutions to similar social problems through education, the cultural roots of promising programs in other cultures bear close scrutiny before attempts are made to adapt them. Clearly, the applicability of the American approach that derives from a fundamental belief in individual effort, hard work and material success would be a stranger in many other cultures.

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